

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: February 25, 2008

From :  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 11(c): Consideration of resolution supporting Governor Schwarzenegger's Wildland Firefighting Initiative.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy support Governor Schwarzenegger's Wildland Firefighting Initiative.

Legislative Authority: Section 33211(c) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: California's communities faced a range of emergencies and natural disasters in 2007, including flooding, heat waves, winter freezes, mudslides, droughts, and earthquakes. In addition, Southern California and Lake Tahoe residents and first responders heroically faced some of the largest firestorms in state history. Earlier this year, the Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Task Force issued a list of critical recommendations to improve emergency response in the state. While the response to the fires showed why our emergency response system is among the nation's strongest, the state has a responsibility to aggressively prepare for future wildfires and natural disasters. Governor Schwarzenegger's Wildland Firefighting Initiative as proposed in his 2008-09 budget proposal addresses key recommendations of the Task Force and supports California's ability to prepare for and respond to the wide range of emergencies and natural disasters. The Wildland Firefighting Initiative will support first responders with new equipment and technology, improve overall emergency preparedness and response, and help save lives and property. The proposal will improve emergency response and preparedness in every community across the state and benefit all Californians—those in urban areas, rural areas, and those routinely affected by wildfires.

The initiative will:

Increase the number of firefighters assigned to each CAL FIRE engine from three to four during peak fire season and improve response time with bigger crews.

Provide more than 100 Office of Emergency Services (OES) fire engines on loan to local firefighters, increasing the total available from 119 to over 250 over five years.

Add new helicopters that perform better for less. Under the Governor's proposal, CAL FIRE will buy 11 new all-weather, 24-hour capable firefighting helicopters and remodel six of nine helitak bases. Compared to current models, they are 40 percent faster, capable of traveling a 485-mile range (compared to 250 miles now), and cost almost five hundred percent less to operate.

Strengthen the California National Guard (CNG) firefighting response. Under this proposal, the state will provide CNF with two full-time helicopter crews, two firefighting systems for the C-130 cargo aircraft and three firefighting helicopter firefighting systems. This will result in quicker response time to all fires.

Outfit key pieces of equipment with GPS to allow CAL FIRE to monitor equipment use in real time and dispatch equipment quickly and effectively to where it is needed most.